

HOMETOWNNEWS

Haiti Quake Poses Challenges For Couple With Yankton Roots

The following story is reprinted with permission of the Long Beach Press-Telegram in Long Beach, Calif. Jennifer Groen is the daughter of Yankton native Bridget O'Hara and granddaughter of Pat and Ronnie O'Hara of Yankton.

PAMELA HALE-BURNS
Long Beach Press-Telegram

What began as a summer trip assisting an orphanage in Haiti has become a five-year mission for Jamie and Jennifer Groen.

The Lakewood couple - Jamie was an eighth-grade teacher at Valley Christian School in Cerritos and Jennifer was a fifth-grade teacher at Lakewood Christian School in Long Beach - pulled up stakes and moved thousands of miles to continue doing what they loved, working with children.

"I have been working with this care center in Haiti since 2001, coming for three weeks in the summer," Jennifer said. "My husband took his first trip here in August 2008; we decided to move here for a year during that trip."

Today, they are living and working at Children of the Promise, an infant-care center in the village of Lagosette, south of Cap-Haitien and about 90 miles north of Port-au-Prince.

The center cares for sick, abandoned, or orphaned chil-

dren. Often they rehabilitate and return them to their biological families in Haiti. When that is not possible, they help U.S. or Canadian families adopt the kids.

Jamie first found the move a call from God, Jennifer said. "I saw a need here for a preschool as all of the children would be going to English-speaking families and most spoke very little English," she said. "When Jamie brought up the idea of us moving here for a year, I was hesitant at first. But, after talking about it more and praying a lot, I felt God's call as well."

Not quite a year into the move, the Groens were faced with the devastation of the magnitude-7 quake that shook the country to its core.

Even before the quake there were 380,000 orphans in Haiti, according to the United Nations Children's Fund Web site. As the death toll continues to rise, so does the number of orphans.

Despite the destruction in what was already one of the poorest countries in the world, the earthquake didn't shake the Groen's faith.

"Shortly after moving, God placed three beautiful Haitian children on our hearts - Mika, (2) Lindy, (1), and Alex (11 months). God has given us three beautiful Haitian children that we are in process of adopting," Jennifer said, adding that they feel com-



Jamie and Jennifer Groen, both teachers at local Christian schools, decided in 2008 to pull up stakes and move to Haiti for a time to work at an infant-care center, Children of the Promise, about 90 miles north of Port-au-Prince.

mitted to remaining five more years in the country.

Jennifer and Jamie are running the orphanage, where they have 45 children ranging from newborns to 5 years old. They have one nurse and a few short-term people there for only two weeks.

They also draw help from the community.

"We employ about 60 Haitian people. The majority of them work as nannies and come in shifts to help care for the children," Jennifer said. "We have a school program to assist in

sending children to school, we run a prenatal program that educates women on how to take care of their babies during and after pregnancy. We also provide food, medicine and formula to many families in need."

Although they were some distance away from the hardest-hit areas, the Groens have seen the pain.

"We did not find out until later that evening what had really happened. When one of the nannies came in and told us that a 7.0 quake had hit Port-au-

Prince, we were shocked," Jennifer said. "Most of the devastation we are experiencing is secondhand. We are seeing the sadness as others find out their families didn't make it. We are rejoicing with those whose families arrive here in one piece. And we are doing everything we can to feed and clothe those who arrive here with nothing."

"Many of our nannies have families in Port. Some of their family members have made their way up to Cap. Others have not," Jamie said. "There are several of our nannies who have not been able to come to work because they are mourning the loss of family members who they have now confirmed are dead."

The Groens received word that one of the organizations that works alongside the orphanage lost several employees.

"The creche (adoption office) we work closely with in Port, New Life Link, has lost a significant amount of their staff," Jamie said. "Their offices collapsed, killing several of their employees. Several of the people who died were good friends of our adoption staff."

Since the earthquake, people who need food, shelter, clothing, and medical attention have been arriving in busloads, Jennifer said.

"We are working with the people in our village to get the necessary things to care for these peo-

ple. We are buying bags of rice and beans, raiding our closets for clothes, and cleaning out our storage room to get blankets," she said. "We are also working on sending a bus to Port-au-Prince to bring supplies and pick up children and adults with no place to live."

Because all banks and wire transfer offices are closed, the orphanage is in serious need of money to keep taking proper care of the orphans and those coming for help, said Jennifer.

"We need cash. We have been unable to get money. Without money we can't help anyone. We need the government to allow these children to be united with their families," she said. "We need planes that will help us get children to the U.S. We believe we will eventually be getting many newly orphaned children coming from Port-au-Prince. When this happens, we will need supplies to feed, clothe, and care for these children as well as staff. The nurse we have now is temporary, and we will soon be in dire need of a long-term nurse."

Their biggest concern is that adoptions that were pending are now at a standstill since the necessary documents are buried in rubble, said Jennifer. For now, they can only wait.

"We are waiting for the government to make it possible to get these kids home," Jennifer said. "All we can do from here is pray."

CHAMBER AMBASSADOR



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Mary Pfeiffer was honored as the Chamber Ambassador of the Year by the Yankton Area Chamber of Commerce during the chamber's annual meeting Jan. 26. Pfeiffer is pictured with outgoing Chamber President Lynn Peterson.

CHAMBER SERVICE AWARD



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Nate Franzen (left) and Tom Bohnet were honored for their service to the Yankton Area Chamber of Commerce during the chamber's annual meeting, held Tuesday, Jan. 26, at Minerva's. Both Franzen and Bohnet are leaving the Chamber's board of directors this year. They are pictured with outgoing Chamber President Lynn Peterson.

FRIENDS OF EDUCATION



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Yankton Area Chamber of Commerce honored several local volunteers with the 2009 Friends of Education awards, presented Tuesday, Jan. 26, during the Chamber's annual meeting at Minerva's. Volunteers honored included, from left: Pauline Rhoades (Webster School), Jolene Berndt (Beadle School), Don and Mary Fiedler (Yankton High School) and Delight Paulson (Sacred Heart School). They are pictured with outgoing Chamber President Lynn Peterson. Not pictured: D.A.R.E. Officer Mike Burgeson (Stewart School) and Sister Candy Chrystal (Yankton Middle School).

CORNERSTONE AWARD



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Brad Dykes of Yankton Hy-Vee was honored with the Cornerstone Award by the Yankton Area Chamber of Commerce during the chamber's annual meeting Jan. 26. Dykes was unable to attend the meeting, but his award was accepted by, from left, Dave Stanga, Becky Soucek and Josh Suing. They are pictured with outgoing Chamber President Lynn Peterson.

Frick United Way Volunteer Of Month

United Way & Volunteer Services Volunteer of the Month is Tyler Frick. Frick's way of giving back to the community is through volunteering. This energetic high school senior makes sure that he takes time to give to others by volunteering.

Watching his mother volunteer has inspired Tyler to take the same journey. It is now second nature to him. He can be found Thursdays at the nurse's station at Avera Sacred Heart Hospital delivering trays to patients and making charts by putting together papers for the patients to fill out their general information, which saves the nurse's time in preparation for the incoming patients.

Frick has also volunteered at his church with the Banquet numerous times, cleaning the



Frick

church and helping his mom teach Religious Education to 5th graders. He has been involved with Gift Givers all four years at Yankton High School. And he has assisted at Roger Haas

Basketball Tournament. Avera Sacred Heart Hospital nurses station continues to be his favorite volunteer job.

Tyler said, "it is so easy to get involved and that anyone can volunteer. It gets you motivated and once you get started, it just becomes routine. You might find you really enjoy it. The best part of volunteering is going around to all the people and putting a smile on their faces."

FAMILY BUSINESS AWARD



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Luken Memorials, Inc., was honored with the Yankton Area Excellence in Family Business Award during the Chamber's annual meeting at Minerva's on Tuesday, Jan. 26. Pictured with outgoing Chamber President Lynn Peterson (far right) are, from left: Bob Luken Jr., Scott Luken, Bob Luken Sr., Beth Anderson and Tina Ziegler.

MEETING MINUTES

YANKTON COMMUNITY FORUM

Members of Yankton Community Forum returned from the holidays to renew friendships and enjoy a program arranged by Daryl Bernard featuring a talk by Sen. Jean Hunhoff. The local legislator spoke of financial challenges facing the state.

The following Tuesday morning Jared Adamson explained the benefits and growing use of geothermal heat, courtesy of member Cy Beye.

At the third weekly gathering, Merle Larson presented Rev. Joe Schulte, who spoke enthusiastically about local support for the "sack-pack" program, which benefits local elementary school children by providing food for the weekend.

Yankton Community Forum meets weekly Tuesday mornings at 8:30 a.m. at Hillcrest Country Club for 1 1/2 hours of sociability and information about the community. Anyone, male or female over fifty, is encouraged to visit and join.

CATHOLIC DAUGHTERS COURT WILLARD #967

Court Willard #967 met Jan. 21 at Sacred Heart Dining Room. The Rosary was led by Msgr. Herman. The meeting was opened by Regent Verma Kuchta with a prayer, followed by the Flag Pledge. The treasurer's report was given by Treasurer Patti Paul.

Sherryl O'Rourke asked that she be informed of any address changes and to let her know if you have a cell phone number.

Kathy Campbell talked about the upcoming Education Contest. The deadline is Feb. 8. Please contact her for the forms.

Bev Schmidt presented us with a wonderful story about a carrot, egg and coffee bean. Which one are you? The February meeting will be at the Sacred Heart Dining room with a 7:00 Stations of the Cross, also in the dining room.

Regent Verma Kuchta thanked Cheryl Lenon & committee for their years of service with the JCDA.

Mary Johnson talked about the soup kitchen coming up on Feb. 9 at the Moose Lodge. Sign up sheets were passed around for pies and workers. Please call Mary to sign up if you were not at the meeting.

Our next meeting will be Feb. 18, with Stations of the Cross at the Sacred Heart Dining Room at 7:00 followed by the meeting.

YANKTON TOASTMASTER CLUB 1294

Yankton Toastmaster Club 1294 met Saturday, Jan. 30, at the Fry'n Pan Restaurant.

The meeting was called to order by President Jeremy Skrenes who led the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, and gave the invocation.

Toastmaster of the Day was Steve Hamilton who conducted the meeting. Grammarian John Swensen gave the word of the day, "schism," which means a division into hostile groups. Barb Mechtenberg gave a speech titled "BPA - Reason for Concern" from the Competent Communication Manual with the objective of researching her topic. Angela Mann gave a speech titled "Technical Communication, Procedures, and Lean" from the Speeches by Management Manual with the objective of presenting technical information in an understandable speech.

Table topics was led by Joy Winther who asked members to

response to Valentines Day questions. Roy Wilcox evaluated the meeting, and called on Vernon Arens to evaluate Mechtenberg's speech, and Janice Stone to evaluate Mann's speech.

Presentations were given by grammarian Swensen, ah counter and timer Kevin Buhl, vote counter Marjorie Merritt, and joke master Hamilton. Trophies were presented to Buhl for best table topics, Mann for best speaker, and Arens for best evaluator.

Matt Stone reported on the upcoming Speech Craft that will be held in April and May. Speech Craft is an 8-week mini-course to introduce people to public speaking and leadership, and will be open to the public.

For more information about Speech Craft, contact Matt Stone at 605-660-3904. The business meeting was led by Skrenes. Guests are welcome. For more information call 665-8448.

ASHH TOASTMASTERS CLUB 6217

Vice-President of Education Jennifer Wubben from ASHH Toastmasters Club 6217 congratulated the meeting's impromptu Table

Topics winners, Stan Sudbeck and Connie Stenson, at the January 28 meeting held in the Benedictine Center. Wubben noted that the whimsical question to Sudbeck dealt with picking a dog's name. Sudbeck said, "I let the dog's temperament influence the name." Stenson was asked whether raising a dog prepares a couple for raising a child.

She replied that raising a dog and a child at the same time was good training for both.

The Toastmaster for this meeting was David Fiebelkorn. He called upon David Bell and Mindy Schweitzer for their portions of the meeting. Bell's invocation was being thankful for life's many blessings. Schweitzer provided Table Topics questions using a "pet theme".

General Evaluator for the meeting was Jeff May. His team consisted of two evaluators, Sheryl Schwartz and Taylor O'Bryan. Schwartz commented on Greg Stach's health care speech entitled "It's All Jabbberwocky!" O'Bryan gave pointers to Jane Miller on her power point presentation on China entitled

"What the Travel Shows Don't Tell You!" The trophies went to Schwartz as Best Evaluator and Miller as Best Speaker.

The rest of the day's duties were performed by: Bell, who counted the votes; Sherry Soukup, who timed the speeches; MJ Rogers, who kept track of the unwanted "ahs"; and Muriel Stach, who defined the word of the day "frumious".

Then Wubben conducted the business portion of the meeting. She officially welcomed Stenson as a newly accepted member in Avera Sacred Heart Hospital Toastmasters Club 6217.

INTERCHANGE

Interchange met on Feb. 1 at the Waterfront. The meeting was called to order by President, Stacy Winterringer. Guests were introduced.

The following announcements were made: Carmen Schramm reminded everyone about Yankton Day at the Legislature. A chartered bus will go to Pierre on Feb. 10. Please give Carmen a call at the

Chamber if you are interested in attending.

Kathy Gerstner reminded everyone about the Women of Distinction Luncheon to be held Feb. 15 at Mount Marty College.

Crystal Mench-Nelson reminded everyone of the upcoming WNAX exhibit that will be at the museum beginning Feb. 20.

Kathy Greenway won the January birthday lunch certificate.

Penny School from Avera Sacred Heart was the hostess and she introduced Pam Rezac and David Bell who were the speakers for the meeting. The program was titled Shaping the Yankton Region Health Care and looking for your input. Pam spoke about 5 areas. They were service, quality, technology, people and community wellness.

We then had a table top discussion at each table and gave our input at the end of the meeting. Next meeting is Feb. 8 at the Waterfront.

Nancy Wenande will be the hostess and Dave Spencer from the Yankton Ice Association will be the speaker.

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